

## Notre Dame - Glory or Shame?

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*The heart of France is on fire. An inferno rocked France. Notre Dame, cultural icon of France and UNESCO declared World Heritage, was burning. The flames devastated the wooden roof and the spire. They caused, at first sight, only light damage on the 12<sup>th</sup> century cathedral's structure and historic treasures, as most of the latter were either removed for the ongoing renovation, or were removed just in time by firefighters. Some damage to religious artifacts may have been caused by the enormous amounts of water used by the 500 firemen who dozed the blaze which took about 12 to extinguish. Given the circumstances - a bone-dry wooden roof and spire, largely unprotected from fire hazards - the 850-year-old gothic master piece was lucky for having been saved at all.*

While it is not clear yet, at least not publicly, what caused the blaze, fire safety protection measures were insufficient. First, the burnability of hundreds of years old solid oak was underestimated. Second, according to Benjamin Mouton, the architect who oversaw the fire protections, and as reported by the NYT,

“The system was based on the assumption that if the cathedral ever caught fire, the ancient oak timbers in the attic would burn slowly, leaving ample time to fight the flames.” He added, “The fire alarms in Notre-Dame did not notify fire dispatchers right away. Instead, a guard at the cathedral first had to climb a steep set of stairs to the attic — a trip that would take a “fit” person six minutes.”

Therefore, there was already a built-in delay of about 20 minutes for the firemen starting to fight the flames, an important time span at the beginning of a fire.

This is a significant detail, considering the speed with which the flames spread through the wooden roof and the spire. Some islamophobes already point their fingers to a terror attack, especially on a Christian house of worship in the week before Easter, resurrection of Christ, the Christians holiest celebration.

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The socially most disturbing factor is the speed with which the French billionaires - later they were joined by international oligarchs - pledged their (tax-deductible) donation to fix the cathedral. Within just a couple of days, more than a billion euros in donation were pledged by the richest of the rich French billionaires.

First estimates of damage came in as between € 500 and € 700 million. Once the pledges were in, nobody talked about cost estimates anymore. It will be interesting to see, who gets the excess money. - Maybe the poor Frenchmen, who have to survive on €500 a month, live in the street, or in tent cities on the periphery of Paris, and whose children go hungry to bed

- if they have a bed - every night. Though, I don't think it was the intention of the billionaires that 'left-overs' should go to the poor.

Macron, with gleaming eyes went on TV - his moment to detract from his fierce opponents, the Yellow Vests - promising that "we will rebuild this monument even more beautiful than it was before". He called for an international bidding process to assure that the best architects will work on the reconstruction of this world renown icon.

Macron even postponed 'indefinitely' talking about the reform measures he was planning after the three months of 'debate' intended to end the weekly Yellow Vest protests. But he didn't. And even if he would have made loads of concessions, the protests would not go away, short of Macron resining. That's the level of trust he has left. Protests are fiercer than ever, because people are to see that the rich have no problem donating hundreds of millions, in sort of a contest of one-upmanship - *'I'll outdo you'* type of corporate propaganda, while paying no or very little taxes.

If they were to pay their due in taxes, the Yellow Vests rightly argue, there would be no need for donations. The cultural restoration and rehabilitation fund would have plenty of money, and, in addition, there would be no justification for increasing taxes for the lower-earning echelons of society - exactly what Macron was doing and continues doing, taxing the poor into the ground. On Saturday 20 April, the day before Easter, 28,000 Yellow Vests rallied in Paris against the oligarchs spending generously and egocentrically for showmanship, but resist paying their taxes so that all of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen could live a decent life.

The Yellow Vest protesters passed by the blackened ruins of Notre Dame to pay their homage to the monument - showing that their demonstrations had nothing to do with rebuilding the church, but had much to do with how the impunity of shuffling money - and ever more money - from the lower strata of society to the billionaires, has reached a point of no-more-tolerance. It's a catastrophe, and the Yellow Vests will not end their outcry for justice, unless Macron resigns and a direct democracy is installed. That's what they are fighting for - and have been fighting precisely six months already. They are poised not to give up, no matter how Notre Dame is going to be rebuilt.

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There is an even more nefarious angle to this - and other monuments. Hundreds of years of French exploitation of her colonies in Africa, of enslaving, raping, ravaging, killing and plundering Africa's resources, has allowed France and many other European nations to amass insane amounts of stolen assets - with which they built and now boast about their monuments, castles, churches, with which they maintained their empires and today maintain their kingdoms. Theft and plunder are the basis for the rich culture and famous shrines the brave and wise Europeans conceived and built.

Notre Dame - a house of Christ - is one of those monuments that would possibly not exist, if France would not have had the illegally begotten resources from wars and pillaging the African Continent - something which France's neocolonialism continues doing today, through the Banque de France's controlled "former" West and Central African French colonies. Another shameful and ongoing occurrence, nobody dares talk about it - which allows France to rob untold billions from poor African countries - making sure that their

development is stunted. It works, as long as they keep puppet dictators in power.

Today its NATO – with its swift wars and killing sprees that keeps colonialism alive, keeps the resources flowing from south to north, impoverishing the south, dividing the south by creating chaos for better control – and especially for guaranteeing the continuation of elite-enriching theft. – May Notre Dame – the House of God – her reconstruction, remind us that France’s oligarchs still benefit from the atrocious and illegal economic resources drain from Africa and the Middle East; that such injustice must to stop.

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